

From Riffraff to Royalty

Matthew 22:1-14

BBC, May 25, 2014

Pastor Kevin Sauder

PROPOSITION: *God's honor demands response.*

Respond to God's Call (v. 1-10)

- God's invitations are commands to obey (v. 1-4)
- God punishes all who don't respond (v.5-7)
- God will be honored (v. 8-10)

Respond in God's Way (v. 11-14)

- The way you respond matters (v. 11-13)
- God's way brings Him honor (v. 14)

The Parable of the Wedding Feast from Matthew 22:1-14:

22 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, 3 and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast."' 5 But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' 10 And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. 12 And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

It was the first Wednesday of the month, and a group of you were huddled together to pray for the needs of the church. The year was 2008. You were gathered in the sanctuary of the Knoxville church building, and one of the families you prayed for that night was ours. My wife Jody and I were living in CA at the time while I attended seminary, and boy did we appreciate the prayers of this church. Seminary life is always challenging. And it was an especially dependent time in our lives. I was a full-time student, serving in ministry, and also working 30 hours a week as an accountant to try to make ends meet. The money was tight. Our second child Andrew had just been born. To add to the pressure, I had

just been diagnosed with Mono. I still remember when Jody told me, “Well I just paid all the bills and we have \$30 to our name!” God was faithful to always provide all our needs.

So this little group of believers back in Peoria prayed for us. And God heard their prayers! But they had no idea how God would answer.

I still remember opening the mail that day and just staring at the check in my hand. It was from a retired friend – the check had my name on it, and the amount started with a 2, and then had 4 zeros after it... before the decimal point! What amazing generosity! The tears flooded down our faces as we hugged each other that day – not knowing whether to dance in joy or fall on our knees in humble awe of God’s kind mercy towards us. This friend had graciously given us a huge amount of money so that I would be able to transition into a full-time vocational ministry role for my last year at seminary. This generous gift provided just what we needed for our last year of ministry training. God answered our prayers way more generously than we ever expected!

Now in that moment when we received his gift, consider how the donor was honored! If our friend could have seen us crying together in our living room together, great would be his joy, for it is more blessed to give than even to receive! As a personal side note – this was one of those times I remember wishing that I could fly home to Peoria and “give a testimony” to our church family back here. How good is our God! He answers prayer, and He is so generous!

But consider for a moment.... How would this donor respond if I never got around to cashing the check? Or worse yet, if he knew that I only took his money to purchase a multi-page full-color advertisement in the LA Times to publicly slander his name and ridicule him for his gift. Think of how such rejection would cause shame and dishonor.

The emotions that you are feeling right now in considering such foolish rejection is similar to what Christ’s audience felt as Christ told this story in Matthew 22.

What kind of fool would not accept such amazing generosity? And what kind of king would not immediately punish such rebellion? How extraordinary that such grace would be rejected in such rebellion.

This is the point of our parable today from Matthew 22.

God’s honor demands response.

Those who treat God’s amazing grace with contempt and indifference will be exposed and judged. Those who fail to make use of what the King has provided, will be condemned. But when we accept God’s gracious call and feast at His banquet table – what honor! What honor for us as His children, and what honor is God’s for His abundant generosity and grace!

This Scripture teaches us that God’s honor demands response. The glory and goodness of God demands we sit up and pay attention this morning. Jesus will be exalted when His kingdom comes. God will be honored forever at the last day. So how will you respond to His Gospel call today?

Respond to God's Call (v. 1-10)

In verse 1 of Matthew 22 we read,

22 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, ...

Jesus is still answering the rebellion of the Pharisees. He says *again*, because in fact this is the third parable that Jesus gives in response to the religious leader's rejection of His divine authority. Today's parable continues the theme of the first two. It is a judgment parable. Friend, **Now ...not later, is the time to respond to Christ.** All those who reject Christ will be judged and condemned. All are now invited to enter God's kingdom, but all who reject Jesus Christ as their Savior will be destroyed. God will not allow Himself to be dishonored in the end by those who refuse His amazing generosity.

And so Jesus says, 2 *"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son,*

Living with Jesus as your King is like going to a grand wedding feast. Is that how you think of God's gospel? Do you think of God's call to repent and believe in Jesus more like an invitation to a funeral, or an invitation to a feast?

God's coming kingdom is going to be a marvelous celebration of His Son Jesus. In His kingdom, God offers his naked enemies the clothing of royalty, and delights to satisfy them with the abundant provisions of His covenant love.

This is an extraordinary celebration! The king had one goal – He wanted to honor His Son in His marriage! No expense would be spared to honor His Son in this royal celebration!

The king in this story represents God, and the prince is Jesus Christ. His servants represent all the prophets that God had sent His chosen people over time – from Moses to Jeremiah to John the Baptist.

And just like the King in this parable, God the Father is resolved to honor His Son. As Jesus taught us in John 5:20,

20 the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. 22 The Father...has given all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

God the Father desires that all would honor and worship God the Son. Not because Jesus Christ needs our honor. Jesus is supremely full of glory in His person without our praise and adoration. Jesus lacks nothing. He is Lord ...after all. His beauty is unparalleled. His power is staggering. Colossians 1 says that *"by Him all things were created... all things were created through Him and for him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."* Jesus Christ is not only creator, but He is Savior. He is bridegroom. He is "All" to the redeemed!

Do you desire to honor Jesus today?

He is worthy of honor. He is worthy of praise. Jesus is worthy of worship. And if you are to honor Jesus, then you must respond to God's call to repent and believe in Him, because:

- God's invitations are commands to obey (v. 1-4)

In v. 3 we are stunned to read that the King

3 sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.

What? Who would turn down a personal invitation to join the King and His family at a royal feast for the Prince and His Bride?

They would not come. They were indifferent to the call, even though the King had sent them a prior "Save the Date" notice. It's like the royal limo pulling up to the bride's home to take her to the wedding, and she's more interested in getting her ½ priced milkshake at Steak & Shake's Happy Hour down the street. It doesn't make sense!

Yet they refused to come.

The invitation here represents God's call to believe in Jesus and worship Him forever. (The feasting symbolizes a lifestyle of enjoying God forever.) This is an extremely generous offer!

Clearly their refusal to accept God's call was not neutral. Jesus wanted the Jewish leaders of His day to understand this clearly. Rejecting God's kingdom invitation shows you have no respect for God, and no fear of Him.

It is both an honor and a command to receive an invite from a Sovereign King. When the king of the universe summons you into His presence, only fools refuse to come.

But note the extraordinary patience of the King in verse 4:

4 Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast."'

As you read this, what word would you use to describe our God's response to such blatant rejection?

Patience. Mercy. Grace. Extraordinary Love.

We would fully expect the wrath of the King to burn white-hot against such shameful rebellion and disloyalty. But God again and again offers the abundance of His table. God repeatedly sends His messengers to extend the invitation. Tell them how wonderful the feast is going to be! I've made great preparation! Everything is ready for their joyful feasting and delight! Come to the wedding feast! Come and give honor to my Son!

And again this morning God has sent one of his messengers to you. I come with a royal invitation personalized for you!

Repent of your sins, and believe on Jesus Christ! God the Father is patiently inviting you to come. Come find the joy that you've been created for. Come feast and satisfy your soul in the person and work of Jesus Christ!

No one here today will ever be able to blame God if he is not saved. God is calling you to His salvation right now. God created you, so He has rights over you. You are accountable and responsible. And He is calling you to come and honor His Son! Now is the time. You are responsible to respond to His gracious call in faith. You are accountable to His holy standard of perfection (Matt 5:48).

Is your will set against God's today?

Or do you believe that God's patience will always be there for you, and that you can wait for His heavenly limo to make another round? Wait until the next round of spiritual conviction floods your soul?

Don't wait friend. You must accept God's call today because:

- God punishes all who don't respond (v.5-7)

There is no honor in rejecting God's grace. And yet in verse 5 we read,

5 But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.

Here we see 2 common ways in which people don't respond and reject God's Gospel: First, most of those invited were preoccupied and indifferent. They made light of His royal offer. They paid no attention. They didn't necessarily hate the Gospel call. They didn't oppose the gospel or resist it. They just didn't accept it for themselves. It wasn't convenient or attractive to them at the time. One farm boy went about his concerns in the country, and one city-slicker pursued his concerns in the marketplace. They were indifferent to the Gospel call of God because frankly, **they liked the things of this world far better.**

What about you? Do you need to be awakened from such near-sightedness?

Have you become absorbed with this world – believing that this world has what is best for you? Is your head so full of business, or should we say, busyness, that you are more concerned about your possessions, your power, your position, and your pleasures ...rather than about your soul?

As one pastor said, stop “bartering gold for glass beads.”¹ Refusing God's invitation is an insult to His amazing generosity! God's honor demands your response.

But look at the second way people reject God's Gospel in verse 6. The “rest” it says, actually went farther than disloyal indifference, and actually were Hostile in their Opposition. Ridicule. Persecution

¹ Alexander MacLaren

of God's prophets and messengers. They hated the King so much that they actually killed some of His messengers!

Not surprisingly, in verse 7:

7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

God punishes all who don't respond to His Gospel call. Jesus wanted the Pharisees to get the message loud and clear. Judgment is coming. God's invitation is a command. When you reject such amazing love and throw it back on itself, it becomes wrath.

Do you assume that God will continue to be patient as you live your life for yourself? What flimsy excuses do you have for not receiving Christ today?

Please understand this point my friends. It's not that people can't come, but that they won't come. Like J.C. Ryle said, "Open sin may kill its thousands; but indifference and neglect of the Gospel kill their tens of thousands." Or like Pastor Boice taught, "You do not have to murder a prophet to miss out. You have only to fritter away your time on things that will eventually pass away and thus let your opportunities for repentance and faith pass by."

You must respond to God's call because God will not let your rejection of Him rob His Son of honor and glory.

- God will be honored (v. 8-10)

The kingdom will celebrate when Jesus comes! The feast will not be cancelled just because some refuse to come! God will honor His Son!

Look carefully at the end of verse 8:

... The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy.

Who is worthy to feast with the King? The text is clear. Not everyone who is invited to come is worthy of such an honor. But after all – who can be worthy to be treated to such feasting with the King and His Son?

According to the Gospel of John,

[Jesus] came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Whoever believes in Jesus and accepts the Gospel call is made worthy to come by God Himself! It's not about your background. It's not about how good you are. It's not about what you're able to offer the King. It's all about God's extraordinary grace. "Whosoever will" may repent from their autonomy and

put their faith in Jesus Christ alone! Only God Himself can make a person worthy to be at His banquet table.

And so God invites everyone to come.

9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find. ' 10 And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good.

Because of the Jew's rejection of Christ, "*the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.*" (Matt 21:43). God's invitation and promises of deliverance now extend to the entire world. This is an extraordinary expansion of God's gospel call. The salvation invitation is wide, broad, full, and unlimited – to "as many as you find!"

Are you surprised it says that God's messengers invited everyone...both the good and the bad?

This is really good church!

Through faith in Jesus Christ, God accepts people that man's religion would regard as evil. Tax collectors and prostitutes and hypocrites are now invited to come and believe in Jesus for their salvation! Do you rejoice in this astounding generosity of God?

Or do you secretly find yourself despising the goodness of God which brings vile sinners unto repentance? Do you think you're better than the new believer whom God has saved from sexual perversion, heavy drug use, or the murderous gang world? Do you somehow think that God is not honored by the salvation of the riffraff of this world?

Dear friend. There is none righteous – no not even one. It matters not if your sins are the pride of self-righteousness or the rage of murderous rebellion. No one deserves to be invited to such an eternal and glorious feast with God Himself. It is all grace. And in fact, God honors himself more deeply every time one of the lowly accepts His salvation call...for the humble are far more grateful for God's provisions than those who think themselves worthy. And God's unexpected generosity towards us who are undeserving only increases the joy of all who are in the kingdom. No human being can boast in the presence of God... for all the redeemed are humble, foolish, weak, lowly and despised by this world. And yet God moves and makes a way for salvation through faith in His Son!

So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

In the end, nothing will dishonor God. His Son's bride will be gracious prepared and gathered from all the nations for His eternal glory and joy!

But Jesus continues his teaching to make sure no one misses the profound goodness of His grace. While the Gospel call of God invites all to come just as they are, the worthy response of faith and repentance will always lead to changed life! God's glory demands our response. But are you responding in God's way ...of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ alone?

When you answer the call, you must:

Respond in God's Way (v. 11-14)

You can't come to God on your own terms... it requires perfection to enter God's kingdom! Yes God invites riffraff like me from the slums of unbelief to join His royal wedding feast. But He doesn't intend for us to continue living in the slums! Indeed, accepting God's invitation leads to complete transformation! For

- The way you respond matters (v. 11-13)

*11 "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment.
12 And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.*

Can you imagine the joy and honor of that moment when the King enters to visit among the guests? It is the highest joy of the redeemed to be in the presence of God Himself (Ps. 16:11)!

But one person is singled out by Jesus in this parable ... highlighting the fact that entering the kingdom is an individual matter. And the way a person enters the kingdom is of highest importance.

It is right for us to believe that the King in this parable had furnished royal wedding garments for all of His guests to put on and wear during this celebratory feast. Having gathered all the guests from the highways and the byways of life, it would not be expected that all of them would have their own appropriate attire for such a grand and royal occasion. Clearly everyone was expected to be wearing a royal wedding garment. In fact, providing royal attire for all the guests in the colors and markings of His Son purposefully increased His Son's honor at this grand event! And when asked why he was not wearing a garment, this man had no excuse. Understanding that the King clothed all His guests in royalty only magnifies the amazing generosity of the King to all who respond to His Gospel call!

You see, here in the midst of the joy of this grand celebration – the DJ's sound track has a major scratch and everything comes to an awkward silence. The King approaches the one who is not wearing the royal garment which was generously offered to Him.

The King's question is kind and generous...but the man is paralyzed when he comes face to face with the holiness and majesty of the King. There is no excuse. And there is no confession. His tongue is tied by his rebellion.

He knows ...that God knows...that it was his own rejection of the King that kept him from putting on the royal garment. Sure he was at the wedding. But he was going to come on his own terms, in his own way. He wanted the benefits of the feast, without wanting to worship and honor the King and His Son! When offered the King's clothes, he rejected it with the same heart as those who had rejected the invitation to come at all. He didn't take the honor of Christ seriously. And when confronted at last with the holiness of God, his delusion of being good enough melted away like a child's sand castle met by a raging tsunami wave!

Jesus' point in these verses is that you can only enter the kingdom by faith, and such faith will change your life from the inside out. The royal robe represents the righteousness that is given to us in Christ – the perfection of Christ Himself!

So friend – have you put on Christ? God's grace is not cheap. Only those who submit to the King's gracious terms are able to feast at His table. Don't think that your association with God's people is good enough! "I'm in church every Sunday... I'm not one of the radical ones. But I'm good enough." No. You need the perfection of Christ!

And good news! God provides everything He requires! Everything that God expects and requires is provided to us freely through Jesus Christ His Son! God doesn't just change our name, but He changes our character. God's salvation actually changes us – and we go from riffraff to royalty on the inside!

So where are you saying that you can't or you won't? Where are you unwilling to submit to God's generous grace and provision for your life? You can trust God to provide what He requires of you.

And if you talk the talk of a Christian, but inside you know that you are still your own boss... take warning from verse 13:

13 Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

He was bound to show that there will be no escape. He was cast outside of the kingdom – away from the King – where His rebellious self-sufficiency would be given full vent and despair. In the hell of eternal judgment this man will forever rage against the King that he hated.

Please understand this. All "fakes" will be detected, expelled, and eternally condemned on that last day. Hell is home for those seeking the benefits of the kingdom without being willing to honor the Son from their heart. God's judgment is based only on what is absolutely necessary – and that is the perfect worship and honor of His Son! Whoever fails to honor the Son and obey His words will be driven away from God Himself for all of eternity, and granted the miserable fullness of their evil desires.

Have you thought about hell lately? The weeping and gnashing of teeth is not an expression of regret and remorse by the person wishing they could repent. No this is the raging ripeness of sin in its full expression. **No one in hell wishes they could love and worship Jesus.** In hell the true reality of their hateful rejection of Christ is given full expression – and they are subjected to God's righteous judgment forever and ever without escape or relief.

Perhaps you resist such direct truth from our Lord and Savior this morning. After all, in our culture, we teach that being tolerant and accepting of others is the highest good. But not in God's kingdom. There is only one God in His kingdom. And He fully enjoys being God. So when you respond to His Gospel invitation, take care that you respond in God's way of personal repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ alone for your holiness. The way you enter matters, because:

- God's way of salvation brings Him honor (v. 14)

Our salvation is all from God and of God – and in this He is honored above all.

14 For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Just because the Jews thought they were God’s “chosen people” was not enough to be accepted into God’s kingdom.

Many are called. Here Jesus uses the word called to speak of the fact that many in this world will be exposed to the preaching of the Gospel.

It’s helpful to note that there are two different calls discussed in the New Testament. Here the context makes it clear that Jesus is referring to the *external call*, or the *general call* of the Gospel. So “*many are called*” means that many people will hear the Gospel invitation to repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of their sins.

This kind of calling is different than the *internal call*, or what is often called the *effective call* of God. Most often found in Paul’s writings, this call refers to the electing grace of God by which He sovereignly renews the heart and causes a person to respond to the Gospel call by faith.

So Jesus is teaching that many people – including many Jews in this context – will be invited to enter God’s kingdom through repentance and faith, but only a few will be chosen. A smaller amount of people will actually respond in faith, compared to the number of people who hear the Gospel and are invited to believe for their salvation.

His point is clear. Responding to the Gospel call shows yourself to be among the elect. **The elect are known by their obedient response.** Many will hear the gospel call and reject it of their own choosing and will. But by His marvelous grace, God’s Spirit will work within a few so that they actually desire to respond, and prove themselves to be chosen through their obedient response.

God’s salvation is designed to bring Him honor! When Jesus uses the word “chosen” He underscores that salvation is all of God from the beginning to the end. We are never able to boast in our own faith response, or our own ruffraff poverty which gave us cause to be redeemed. As the Apostle Paul teaches,

1 Thess 1:4-5 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

The Gospel is effective in bringing about a response because of God’s sovereign choosing and election of grace. This doctrine of God’s election brings comfort to the believer, and confidence to our evangelism. For the Scriptures are clear that all humans are responsible to worship and honor Jesus Christ. And every person does what he/she chooses to do. When someone rejects God’s salvation, they have only their own willful choice to blame. But when someone is ushered in God’s kingdom, it is because of God’s sovereign grace alone.

God’s kingdom (and how we enter it) is all about Jesus and His honor! What Jesus said in John 6:44 is true, “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*” All who are divinely

transferred from riffraff to royalty are done so by God Himself – by His own choosing, and apart from our own ability.

Salvation is all of God. It is His doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes! I am a Christian simply because God decided to set His love upon me. Not for anything good in me, but simply because of His love and His glory. **His honor demands our response.** Honor God today by accepting His gracious call. Respond in faith to His means of electing grace that places us in Christ, and grants us all of Himself.

Our King is so generous! He desires for you to feast with Him forever. So come today. Don't leave the check uncashed. Worse yet – don't use all that God has given you to dishonor Him as you spend your life in things that will not last. Come. Feast. Everything has been prepared. The king is calling. Come.